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ABSTRACT

The Illinois State University Elementary Teacher Education CORE Program is described. The four-semester program provides for extensive preservice clinical experiences both at on-campus and off-campus locations, an interdisciplinary teaching of content and methods, and a culminating semester at an off-campus Teacher Education Center. The program also operates on the principle of individualized instruction and advising for its preservice teacher-participants. The program illustrates the benefits that may be derived from public school-university cooperative programs. Addresses are given to contact resource persons for further information. (Author/LH).

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ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION

C O R E PROGRAM

A Monograph Prepared For The
Association of Teacher Educators
Orlando, Florida, Conference

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Illinois State University
Elementary Teacher Education

C O R E PROGRAM

Ever since its conception in 1894 as a State Normal School, Illinois State University has been known for its teacher training programs. For many years one of the six largest universities in terms of teachers produced, ISU is currently the leader in this field in the state of Illinois. In an overall enrollment of over 19,000 students, approximately 9,000 are now enrolled in teacher education.

Since its original function was to train elementary teachers, ISU's program in this field throughout the more than 80 years of existence has strived to educate teachers for the future. Thus in the middle to late sixties when elementary school enrollments were growing rapidly, societal expectations of schools were changing, and college students going into teacher education programs were among the new breed of college students, the faculty in the Department of Elementary Education realized the need to develop a more comprehensive, integrated elementary education program than was in existence at ISU and nearly everywhere else. The program of courses was being taught by many departments and included few pre-student teaching experiences in the public schools. This was determined to be not sufficient to produce the quality of teachers needed and the development of a new program began.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The major goals set for the new program were to develop, in cooperation with public school districts, an integrated program of university coursework that included many hours of experience in local schools capped by an extensive and intensive final semester of clinical experiences at an off-campus teacher education center.

In the attempt to meet these goals, the ISU Elementary Education CORE Program has been constructed around three curriculum areas which serve as the basis for the first three CORES. These curriculum areas include the arts, communication areas, and the natural and social sciences. The fourth CORE is the clinical experience component which places students in public schools for an entire semester at an off campus center.

Each CORE is designed around three major organizing elements. Firstly, each CORE has a common content of concepts and ideas drawn from a curriculum area. Secondly, in each CORE the affective, cognitive, social, and emotional development of children is studied as this development relates to a particular curriculum area. Thirdly, each CORE has a unifying strand of curriculum patterns, evaluation techniques, school organization, and changes in teaching roles which are appropriate for each curriculum area.

The CORE Program is designed to provide for:

Cooperative Teaching - In each of the three on campus CORES, instructors from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and other departments in and out of the College of Education plan and implement the program. In this way, needless repetition and overlap, as well as omission of important ideas, are greatly reduced or avoided. Content from human growth and development and curriculum theory are covered in each CORE when it is more relevant and appropriate. Additionally, the CORE approach allows instructors to combine efforts in joint projects so that students can see interrelationships of various kinds. Problems which cut across subject-matter lines can be effectively dealt with within each CORE.

Strands - In each CORE there are topics from child development, curriculum, and evaluation. These are correlated with the central theme of each CORE and is the strand tying the CORES together.

Time - In order to teach each CORE effectively, there is a block of time allotted to provide the flexibility of operation which is the hallmark of a good elementary school program. Thus, a 3-4 hour semester long daily time block is scheduled for each of the first 3 CORES. The fourth CORE provides full time involvement at an off-campus center.

Student Involvement - The structure of CORE provides each student an opportunity to give his full attention for a half-day to elementary education. It also allows for a diversity of educational settings from large group lectures and small group activities to individualized instruction.

Finally, students need also to see how their knowledge can be applied to children from the outset. Therefore, students are provided experiences throughout the CORE Program, starting with CORE I, in working with children and teachers in a real classroom setting. Students receive over 200 hours of actual classroom experiences before the culminating student teaching experience at one of the clinical centers.

CORE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Illinois State University Elementary Education CORE Program that has been in existence since 1970 is a significant change from the previous program and has proven to be successful in meeting the goals established at its conception. The CORE Program consists of four consecutive semesters of professional study which is coordinated with extensive pre-student teaching and student teaching experience in elementary school classrooms. Participants in CORE benefit from the unique arrangement of interdepartmental instruction where coursework is taught by a team of Elementary Education professors and instructors from other departments. The complete program is under the control of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

The four semester program is begun as a second semester sophomore or first semester junior. With an emphasis on personalization, the program provides three CORES on-campus and a fourth at one of the College of Education's off-campus Teacher Education Centers. Entrance to the program requires 45 hours of credit with a gradepoint of at least 2.2. Once admitted, the students are tested in the areas of math and written communication skills. Those that do not meet the set standard have the opportunity to remediate the deficiency before being allowed to continue into CORE IV of the program.

For their involvement in the program each semester, the students are assigned to sections of 25 students. These sections meet at different hours during the day to allow student options in taking other courses. There are currently over 500 students enrolled in the CORE Program.

Personalization is a key word for the CORE Program. Starting with the semester prior to enrolling in teacher education, the student receives personal and professional guidance from an instructor through a continuing seminar throughout the on-campus component of the program. The purposes of these seminars include:

1. Providing students with a close, continuing personal relationship with an advisor.
2. Advising students in terms of course selection in the general education program and selection of minors or resource areas in areas of special interest.
3. Acquainting students with university rules and regulations and services available to them in the university.
4. Helping students evaluate their own personal and social assets and to aid them in capitalizing on these assets.
5. Providing group workshop experiences in interpersonal relationship skills of decision making, assertion training, etc.
6. Assisting students in filling out credentials, resumes, and letters of application for employment.

In CORE I - The Arts, the students receive 12 semester hours credit and meet on a flexible scheduling basis four hours a day five days a week. It is team taught by instructors from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Art, Theater, Physical Education and Music. An additional credit hour of Curriculum Principles is taken concurrently with CORE I.

CORE I is the first professional education experience required in the undergraduate Elementary Teacher Education Program. It is an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding and utilization of the arts - art, drama, physical education, and music in the elementary school. Curriculum and human growth and development principles are introduced, studied, and applied concurrently with instruction in the arts. CORE I is a participatory experience where the students create art and music, develop their own improvisations and work through movement skills as well as planning and implementing approaches for using skills in the elementary school classroom. Through an agreement worked out with the local public and private schools, CORE I students spend approximately 45 hours working in elementary classrooms at grade levels of their choice. These experiences are supervised by their CORE I professors and evaluated by the cooperating teachers on predetermined objectives. These evaluations become part of the student's experience folder which follows them through the CORE program.

In CORE II - Communication Skills, the students receive 12 hours of credit for the course which meets for three hours daily. Instruction is shared by instructors from Curriculum & Instruction, English, and Specialized Educational Development.

CORE II focuses on the teaching of reading, language skills and children's literature. It continues the curriculum strand introduced in CORE I and includes a continued study of child growth and development with emphasis on language acquisition and cognitive development. Basic principles of measurement and evaluation are

added with primary emphasis upon performance objectives and techniques for determining mastery. Media use and development, construction of language learning projects, and exploration of oral-aural-vision-motor language related classroom activities are presented as supporting factors for the language curriculum in the elementary school. Many teaching strategies and activities are explored with opportunities to apply them in micro-teaching and simulated experiences.

In CORE III - The Sciences, the students receive 10 semester hours of credit for meeting three hours daily. Instruction in math, science and social studies is by a team from the Curriculum and Instruction and Mathematics Departments.

CORE III is devoted to the presentation of concepts from the field of social sciences, science, and mathematics appropriate for children in the elementary school. Topics from the curriculum strand are integrated with measurement and evaluation areas throughout the semester. Students are expected to be able to correlate the various knowledge areas within CORE III as well as correlate concepts and competencies from CORE I and II into an integrated curriculum. The students are also expected to show competency in preparing materials and teaching mini-lessons. During this semester, CORE III students spend approximately 60 hours in a planned program working in a local elementary classroom. They are again supervised by the university professors and evaluated by the cooperating public school teachers.

CORE IV - Clinical Center Practicum, is at one of the Department's four Teacher Education Centers. These Centers are a partnership between the university and a local school district(s) to provide pre- and in-service education of elementary teachers. Both institutions have commitments as agreed upon in a written agreement. Besides assisting in providing for the physical needs of the Centers, the cooperating public school districts also participate in the selection of staff and students for the Center and in program development and evaluation. This is accomplished

through an appointed liaison person from the public school district(s) who works closely with the Center Director. This partnership agreement has been found to benefit both the public schools and the university in various ways, but has been most noticeable in the greatly expanded supervised clinical experiences that are provided for the teacher candidates during their semester of involvement in CORE IV.

The CORE IV clinical centers are located in four areas of the state - The Quad Cities, Joliet, Peoria and McLean County. Each of the four Centers has a program designed to utilize the uniqueness of the site and cooperating institutions. As a result the programs differ in the approach used to meet the following common goals:

1. To promote the integration of "on-campus" academic knowledge and theory with "off-campus" public school practice.

2. To provide experiential opportunities for the teacher candidate to become acquainted with the entire school district operation, the community, and its various agencies.

3. To help the teacher candidate analyze what he brings to the teaching-learning experience and to develop self-evaluation skills to enable him to determine his own teaching behaviors and the effects of these behaviors on the learners.

4. To provide the varied clinical experiences and supervision necessary to enable the teacher candidate to develop his own personal style - to "become" as a teacher.

Each Center is staffed by a resident Director and two Center Consultants. One of the consultants is typically a teacher "on loan" from the cooperating school district and paid by the university. The Center secretary may be employed in the same fashion or may be a direct employee of the university. The Center is housed in one of the district schools and has an office and classroom space available for teaching of the advanced reading course and seminars held at the Center.

In CORE IV the approximately fourty-five students at each Center enroll in the ten hour Teaching Practicum, a five hour School and Community Involvement, and if so desired, a three hour course in Advanced Reading. The students are in residence at the Center and spend full days in the coursework and clinical experiences during

the seventeen week semester of involvement. As an example of a Center program, a brief description of the Peoria Teacher Education Center follows.

The fourth semester ISU elementary teacher education program students request the off-campus Center to which they wish to be assigned. Once assigned to Peoria, the semester before their involvement they visit the Center site to tour the 10-12 participating clinic schools. In Peoria they may choose a placement at an inner city, urban or suburban school, and usually receive a placement at a school of their choice. Three to six teacher candidates are clustered in each clinic school for the semester experience. The assignment of several teachers-to-be in each school contributes greatly to the success of the program. They aid each other by critiquing mini-lessons, sharing ideas and experiences, and providing moral support during this demanding comprehensive clinical experience.

The Peoria Teacher Education Center program is divided into three phases with the activities and experiences shown below:

Phase I - Orientation, Assisting & Observing (3 weeks)

Assigned to the principal
Observe and assist all teachers and school staff
Self and community awareness experiences
Reading course involvement
Large group seminars
Approximately two thirds time in schools - one third in other experiences
Supervised by the principal and a Center Consultant

Phase II - Observation, Mini-Teaching & Placement (4 weeks)

Observations in all grade levels, K-8
Teaching carefully planned, 15 minute lessons to a small group of students at each grade level
Reading classes, seminars and awareness experiences continue
Approximately two hours per day spent in classes, remaining five hours in schools
Transition Week is the last week of Phase II
Students request a cooperating teacher at grade desired
Placement conference held by principal, Center Consultant and student
Visits to other types of schools/programs/agencies
Coursework and awareness experiences completed
No involvement in assigned clinic school

Phase III - Teaching Practicum (10 weeks)

Full time assignment to cooperating teacher
Gradual assumption of teaching responsibility
Weekly observation by Center Consultant
Observation by principal
Center Consultant meetings with building cooperating teachers
Individual and building group conferences held with teacher candidates by Center Consultant
Daily oral and written feedback given by cooperating teacher
Teacher candidate assisted in "becoming" as a teacher through use of varied performance-based materials
Self evaluation skills developed
Mid-term and Final Evaluation done by Center Consultant and Cooperating Teacher

In this cooperative partnership arrangement the teacher candidates are provided with all the necessary experiences, guidance, and supervision required to allow them to become an effective teacher. The final grade given for student teaching is based on demonstrated competencies. The majority of grades given are A's and B's but several C's or D's each semester are not uncommon. The success of the program is evident in the high percentage of the Center program graduates that find employment in educational positions. It is believed that this final goal could not be accomplished to the degree it is without the involvement of our public school partners in teacher education.

The Center coordinates the local offering of ISU credit courses, and provides Center and on-campus professors for participation in the district in-service programs as requested. The partnership also facilitates research efforts by the university and the Center faculty. The in-service and research possibilities are an area yet largely untapped.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the total CORE Program took place over a four year time period. After several years of planning, going through the university course changing process and reallocation of faculty positions, a major accomplishment was achieved when the Department of Elementary Education (Since reorganized into the

Department of Curriculum & Instruction) gained complete control of the courses taught in its elementary teacher education program. The time spent by professors from other departments teaching in CORE is provided on full or partial full-time equivalent faculty positions assigned to that department by the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. This arrangement has worked reasonably well.

One CORE at a time was started so that by the fourth semester all four CORES were operational. The traditional program was continued until those that desired to complete it rather than enter the new program were able to do so. Currently, all new elementary education students are electing to enroll in the CORE Program, so consideration is being given to dropping the old program.

Arrangements to provide the pre-student teaching clinical experiences in the local school districts were negotiated by various university administrators. Excellent cooperation has been received, not only in providing experiences but in determining what these experiences should be. A willingness by the teacher to evaluate the participating students and the program itself has also been found and utilized.

Because the off-campus Centers depend entirely upon the cooperation of a participating school district or districts, their selection and involvement was done carefully. University faculty initiated dialogue with various school systems in different geographic areas of the state. Only districts that expressed a sincere desire to become involved, were willing to make a commitment on a long term basis, and could provide the setting needed were invited into a partnership. A mutually acceptable agreement was drafted and approved by both the local boards of education and the university.

At the Peoria Center, the Director was hired a year in advance to the opening of the Center, which was to be ISU's second. The first semester was spent learning the on-campus components of the CORE Program and seeking a potential site. In January of 1971 an agreement was approved by both parties and a liaison person

appointed by Peoria School District #150 to work with the Director in developing the program. A committee of principals had input in designing the program as did on-campus CORE instructors. Concurrently, the Director supervised student teachers in the district and became familiar with the district program. The elementary schools selected to be involved in the program had made a request by both the principal and teachers to be on the teacher education team. This was felt necessary as all teachers in the clinic schools participate in the pre-student teaching experiences of the program.

An agreement was worked out to hire a district teacher as a faculty member of the Center to supervise clinical experiences. This person maintains tenure and fringe benefits in the school district but has her salary paid by the university. A selection committee composed of university faculty, the school district personnel director, a principal, a teacher and the Center Director hired the two other in-residence faculty at the Center. The process has been completed several times as new faculty were needed.

Although the Center Director is responsible for the operation of the Center, he meets with the CORE Coordinating Council on campus and the clinic school principals and liaison person on a regular basis to evaluate and revise the Center Program. This has been a continuous process over the eight year period. Because of the close working relationship of the Center faculty and the district personnel, much inservice training has been provided for the principals and cooperating teachers in the supervision of teacher candidates.

Many other district personnel and community persons willingly serve as resource people and play an important role in the Center Program. This cooperation by the community and schools has been a key factor in being able to provide the extensive and intensive program that produces highly trained teachers that are being hired in the state's schools. Evaluations by all persons involved in the CORE Program as well as follow-up studies of program graduates verify the success of the program.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

The effectiveness of the CORE Program in general and the Clinical Centers specifically is based on input from several categories of people: students; higher education professional staff; cooperating teachers; and public school administrators. Data is collected on a semester and/or yearly basis and is utilized to improve the CORE Program. Specific information pertaining to the entire process is detailed below:

Student Input - Faculty in each CORE have developed specific, written goals which are to be accomplished during the semester. CORE goals relate to content areas as well as experiences of direct participation in real school settings. These goals make up the CORE Evaluation Instrument* which is administered to students after completion of each CORE. Analysis of data from this instrument takes two forms. Firstly, results from specific sections and content areas are provided to individual instructors to be used for self-analysis and personal growth. Secondly, data from a composite of all sections by content area are examined by a committee to evaluate the effectiveness of the total program as perceived by students. Results to date have been overwhelmingly positive. For example, the following represents specific evaluative data regarding the overall CORE Program for 1977-78.

Question: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your educational experiences in the CORE Program?
CORE I (244 students) 95.1% rated their experiences "excellent" or "good."
CORE II (263 students) 88.7% rated their experiences "excellent" or "good."
CORE III (215 students) 92.6% rated their experiences "excellent" or "good."
CORE IV (190 students) 94% rated their experiences "excellent" or "good."

Question: Do you feel the CORE Staff was concerned about you as an individual?
CORE I - 94.3% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."
CORE II - 87.1% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."
CORE III - 94.4% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."
CORE IV - 87.3% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."

*(Because of limited space, only general evaluative questions have been discussed. It should be noted that the CORE Evaluation Instrument consists of 160 separate items, 155 of which are goals relating to specific content areas or direct participation experiences in schools.)

Question: Do you feel that with few exceptions your experiences in CORE have been relevant to your needs?
CORE I - 96.7% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."
CORE II - 94% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."
CORE III - 96.3% answered "definitely yes" or "generally yes."

Question: In light of your student teaching experience, how would you describe your preparation for teaching?
CORE IV - 89.6% answered "very realistic" or "somewhat realistic."

Cooperating Teachers/Administrators - Evaluative input from teachers and administrators in the field are derived by basically two methods. For CORES I-III, a field-campus forum is held at the end of each school year. This forum is attended by representatives from the University as well as a representative from each public school in the university community which has had a CORE student during the year. Strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement of the program are discussed and determined during this meeting. Changes in program are made, when necessary, based on this evaluative process. At the Centers during CORE IV, cooperating teachers and administrators provide input into the effectiveness of the program in both written and verbal forms, individually and in group sessions. Again, the feedback from cooperating teachers and administrators is very positive and reinforces the effectiveness of the total CORE Program.

Professional Staff/Higher Education - An established CORE Council, consisting of two staff members from each of the four CORES and student representatives, has been set up to monitor the entire CORE Program. One of its major responsibilities is to formally seek evaluative input from staff members regarding the effectiveness of the total CORE Program.

Graduates of the CORE Program - During the Fall semester of each year a follow-up study is conducted regarding the previous year's graduates of the CORE Program. Consistently, data collected over the past five years has revealed that CORE graduates rate their CORE experience highly. Results also indicate students continue to find educational employment in significantly high numbers. To illustrate this point, of the ninety-five 1976-77 Peoria Center graduates, 68.5% obtained full time

teaching positions within a semester following graduation. Of those who actively sought teaching positions, 80% were employed as full time teachers. In addition, another 11.5% were employed as teacher aides or substitute teachers. When these graduates were asked to evaluate their Center experiences, 86% rate it either "excellent" or "good."

Finally, it should be stated that although evaluative data from all areas remains positive, there is a planned, continuous effort to render an even stronger program. For example, even though the number of students entering the program has decreased by 40% over the past five years, entrance requirements and levels of competency are being raised to increase the competency of our graduates.

Because of the success seen in the present partnerships, the College of Education at ISU is currently exploring the establishment of the elementary program teacher education centers as collegiate centers that would include a greatly expanded role in the area of in-service education. The College is anticipating the involvement of more school districts in Centers that will provide pre-service education in preschool, elementary, junior high, secondary and special education as well as graduate programs in these areas and other offerings handled through the College of Continuing Education. A reorganization of the College of Education this past year will facilitate this expanded cooperation with our public school partners.

REPLICATION

It is believed that the CORE Program can be replicated in whole or part by other universities seeking to improve their teacher education programs. A commitment must be made at all necessary levels concerning budget and staffing, especially the off-campus components of the program, if it is to be developed to its potential. The in-resident, off-campus faculty must have a strong commitment to involvement in field experiences. Unless they are evaluated in terms of their program responsibilities rather than on-campus criteria, they will find it difficult to compete

for salary, tenure and promotion with their on-campus peers.

The CORE Program has shown that public school-university cooperative programs are the key to improved teacher education. The combined efforts of the two institutions result in a much more closely supervised extensive and intensive experience for the teachers-to-be.

Illinois State University is willing to share what it has learned in its cooperative relationships. For more information on the CORE program contact:

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